

IS THE RAINBOW BROKEN? Findings from the fieldwork in Italy

Policy Brief

1.

Background

Domestic violence is a current concern of Italian society which has required the intervention of the State to protect the victims, often intended as cisgender heterosexual women.

According to studies conducted by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) and the Department of Equal Opportunities (DEO), certain individuals are known to be perpetrators of severe sexual and physical violence. In 2015, over 60% of all reported cases of domestic violence were committed by partners.

The legislation in Italy dealing with domestic violence is in line with the Istanbul Convention, which states that this type of violence is a violation of women's rights and a threat of gender-based discrimination. It applies to all victims regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, many of the provisions are directed toward cisgender women.

However, in 2020, the Italian equality body (UNAR) funded the establishment of several centers that are designed to provide free and confidential services to individuals who are suffering from discrimination due to their gender identity or sexual orientation. These centers should also have the necessary resources to help them manage their health and psychological conditions.



The Family Environment in Italy

A certain culture of machismo, protection of the privacy of family life, fear, sub-consciousness of being a victim of violence, lack of familiarity with the Italian language and law, limited trust in the authorities, are only some of the reasons which prevent abused victims to ask for help.

Moreover, Italy's traditional family structure can exacerbate domestic violence within the LGBTI community. Social and cultural norms often prioritize heterosexual relationships, creating an environment where non-conforming relationships face discrimination and exclusion. This exclusion can isolate individuals from vital support systems, leaving them more vulnerable to abuse.

Additionally, in the collective imagination the abuser continues to be identified in a cisgender male individual while the victim continues to be recognised in as a cisgender heterosexual woman. As a result, we tend to exclude the possibility that a LGBTI relationship can be violent or, even when recognised as such, we might underestimate the severity of the abuse, believing that the violence suffered by a man, or one perpetrated by a woman against her partner, is not as severe as a violence that a woman suffers from a man. This notion stems from the fact that we tend to forget that the abuse is based on control and not biological strength or gender.

This policy brief presents some findings from a study conducted within the activities of the ILGA Europe-funded project *Broken Rainbow? Domestic Violence and the*



*LGBTI Community in Italy*¹, which aimed at filling the research gap in the field of domestic violence and the LGBTI community in Italy, by combining quantitative and qualitative data collections, and investigate the access to services and assistance by victims.

3.

Research methods

The research that was conducted for this study was carried out using various qualitative and quantitative methods. Some of these included interviews, surveys, and desk research.

The plan for the research was divided into three phases. The first phase focused on analyzing the domestic violence that occurs within the LGBTI community. This research was carried out from the baseline of a previous study.

The second phase of the study involved the creation of a survey that was designed to be used by the LGBTI community. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the various factors that affect the victims of domestic violence. Some of these include their attitudes toward the help and services that are provided to them.

In the final phase of the study, which was focused on analyzing the effects of domestic violence on the LGB-

¹ The project *Broken Rainbow? Domestic Violence and the LGBTI Community* is funded by ILGA-Europe Documentation and Advocacy Fund.



TI community, some of the interview participants were from the established centers that combat discrimination against the LGBTI community. The objective of these interviews was to gather information about the various effects of violence on the individuals who are affected by it.

4.

Key findings

The quantitative data-collection has revealed that family violence against the LGBTI persons and within the LGBTI community does exist. Often the episodes of violence can be considered to be the consequence of reiterated bias and stereotypes regarding sexual orientation and gender identity or a more general structural stigma. However, the phenomenon is not well acknowledged, and victims are somehow reluctant to report their experiences. Discrimination is rarely reported because the legal framework is considered unreliable.

In the qualitative study, family violence was described as strongly interrelated to other forms of collective violence and discrimination. Almost all the activists in this study reported the high occurrence of psychological abuse and the high request for psychological support also for dealing with the internal factors for help-seeking behaviours. Among barriers for help-seeking behaviours, the lack of adequate legislations for dealing with violence and discrimination in the LGBTI community were considered strong obstacles to the emergence of violence. Indeed, the violence was often defined as a result of systemic



discrimination affecting LGBTI people.

Activists also reported that the low occurrence of family violence cases could be the result of submerged and unreported data from victims, or it could depend on the fact it is difficult to clearly distinguish hate-based violence from family violence. Furthermore, all activists reported the importance of offer different interventions adapted to single specific situations. Some activists were particularly concerned with young transgender boys and girls facing the paths of gender affirmation.

For future directions, we identified the importance of working for increasing awareness of violence toward LGBTI people both in victims and in society, the relevance of education and of team-based interprofessional care. In this study indeed, the importance of awareness of violence was a theme shared by the cis-het and LGBTI populations as a barrier to seeking help and one of the major goals that associations seek to pursue in order to empower victims to recognize, counteract, and prevent violence. Also, education, training and information was identified as a vital factor. Finally, we identified the importance of a team-based interprofessional care for dealing with the complexity of family violence situations and the multiple vulnerabilities or risk factors for victims.

5.

Policy implications

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are put forward:



For public authorities and/or administrations:

- *Inclusive Laws and Policies:* Authorities should develop and implement laws specifically addressing domestic violence within the LGBTI community, ensuring that domestic violence laws explicitly include protections for all gender identities and sexual orientations.
- *Personnel Training:* Provide mandatory training to health-care professionals, social workers, law enforcement, and emergency service providers to recognize and handle cases of LGBTI domestic violence sensitively and appropriately.
- *Dedicated Resources:* Allocate specific funds for programs and services aimed at preventing and supporting LGBTI victims of domestic violence, including safe shelters and support services.
- *Promotion of Safe Reporting:* Ensure there are safe and accessible channels to report domestic violence, and that LGBTI individuals feel secure in reporting cases without fear of discrimination or reprisal.
- *Monitoring and Data Collection:* Implement data collection systems that include specific information about domestic violence within the LGBTI community to better understand the scope of the issue and guide resource allocation.

For non-governmental organizations (NGOs):

- *Specific Services:* Organizations should provide direct services and specific resources for LGBTI victims of domestic violence, such as safe shelters, psychologically and legally sensitive support tailored to the community's needs.
- *Education and Awareness:* Conduct educational programs and workshops to increase awareness about domestic vi-



olence in LGBTI relationships. These programs can be held in schools, community centers, and online.

- *Strategic Collaborations:* Establish partnerships with other LGBTI and non-LGBTI organizations, including social services, government agencies, and law enforcement, to develop a broader and integrated support network.
- *Advocacy and Activism:* Engage in advocacy activities to ensure that the needs of LGBTI individuals affected by domestic violence are part of governmental policies and programs.

Specific recommendations relating to transgender people:

- *Gender-Affirming Services:* Ensure that support services and safe shelters are inclusive and sensitive to the gender identities of transgender individuals, providing safe and welcoming spaces that respect their gender identity and expression.
- *Empowerment Programs:* Create specific empowerment programs for transgender individuals, promoting economic and social independence to reduce dependence on abusive situations.
- *Culturally Competent Resources:* Ensure that resources and services are culturally competent and sensitive to the diverse experiences and backgrounds of transgender individuals, recognizing the unique challenges they may face in domestic violence situations.
- *Involvement of the Transgender Community:* Actively involve members of the transgender community in the design and implementation of programs and policies aimed at combating domestic violence, ensuring their voices are heard and considered.



